A Research Proposal

on

A Study on Deciphering the Antecedents of Brand Avoidance

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1. Introduction

Relationships between people and brands in some cases bear notable resemblances to interpersonal relationships **(Fournier 1994).** One of the strong justifications behind the Consumer-Brand relationship to be somewhat similar to interpersonal relationships could be indicated in the ways the brands are anthropomorphized, animated, humanized and sometimes personified. This phenomenon of humanizing the brands (Inanimate objects) can be seen more or less universally in all societies **(Brown, 1991)** and consumers find no surprise in assigning human like personalities to these brands **(Aaker, 1997; Levy, 1985, Plummer, 1985).**

Since Fournier's attempt to conceptualize the anthropomorphic view of consumer-brand relationship in 1998, an altogether novel field of consumer research extending this concept began **(Ahuvia, 2005; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005)**. These consumer-brand relationship studies formed the base for the emergence of constructs like brand attachment **(Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005)** and brand love **(Ahuvia, 2005; Batra et al., 2012).** These constructs describe strong and positive emotions consumers have towards a brand. While these two constructs are useful in understanding consumer-brand relationships, still-pressing is the need to explore the antecedents of the not so pleasant side of consumer-brand relationship- 'brand avoidance' for the relationships are not always sweet but can turn bitter sometimes.

The research available on negative evaluations of products and brands is very limited, especially when compared to the research done on positive attitudes like brand love and brand attachment. This asymmetry seems quite obvious, particularly in the marketing field as marketers are very much interested in knowing the practical consequences of having positive or favorable consumer-brand relationships. No doubt these positive attitudes are associated with positive WOM, brand loyalty, increased willingness to pay a price premium, and forgiveness of brand failures, all of which makes a brand a preferred choice as a partner for consumers. On the other hand, this asymmetry is difficult to justify on a theoretical level considering that, in order to better understand and explain purchase and consumption behavior based on consumer-brand

relationship, it is extremely necessary to put both positive and negative perspectives together and hence the phenomenon of brand avoidance and hate (negative consumer-brand relationships) must be legitimately emphasized upon.

There has been a recent increase in consumer research on the topic of brand dislike, brand avoidance and anti-consumption **(Banister and Hogg 2004; Englis and Soloman 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Hogg and Banister 2001; Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Rumbo 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Zavestoski 2002a, Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009; Portwood-Stacer, 2012).** Studying these phenomena of brand avoidance/dislike/hate is even more important today as the world shrinks into a global village connected through World Wide Web and information communication technology. With the advent of World Wide Web, traditional word-of-mouth, which is known to be an oral form of interpersonal non-commercial communication among acquaintances **(Arndt, 1967),** has transformed into a more contagious form of communication, namely electronic word-of-mouth. Electronic word-of-mouth refers to as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product, brand or company via Internet **(Hennig-Thurau et.al. 2004).** The web 2.0 along with its tools (e.g., online discussion forums, consumer review sites, weblogs, social network sites, etc.) to exchange product information **(Lee, Park and Han, 2008)** has made this phenomenon even more relevant. Since electronic word of mouth is independent of marketers' selling intents **(Lee & Youn, 2009),** it is thus considered to be more trustworthy and credible **(Bone 1995; Bickart & Schindler 2001)** by consumers.

This means, people will share their good experiences and will not keep quiet about the bad experiences and will share them with other customers online. Previous research suggests that negative word-of-mouth has greater influence on customers' brand evaluations than positive word of mouth **(Arndt, 1967; Mizerski, 1982; Richins, 1983, 1987; Wright, 1974)** and unfortunately, bad experiences spread much faster than good experiences. Studies also indicate that dissatisfied consumers engage in spreading negative word of mouth at least twice as frequently as satisfied consumers communicate their peers about positive product experiences encountered by them **(Hart et al., 1989; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Richins, 1987).** Adding to the gravity of the situation, user-generated content has significantly increased over the last

couple of years. There are numerous anti-brand or brand hate websites/pages that allow consumers to review, rate and evaluate the products and the services of companies **(Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009)**. These websites use expressions, memorable domain names and critical language to create a negative identity for the concerning company or brand, for example ihatestarbucks.com. As a result, negative word-of-mouth spreads not only to friends and family, but to everyone who wants to read, see or hear it.

Negative word of mouth, traditional or Electronic, is the outcome of customers' evaluation of the brands as good or bad on various parameters. Yet, despite this growing interest, the extant literature still lacks a comprehensive understanding of brand dislike/avoidance/anti-consumption/hate and its related themes.

1.1 Brands

Branding has been around for centuries as a mean to distinguish the goods or services of one producer from those of another. However pervasive and well known the concept of branding may be with plethora of brand literature and empirical research, this discipline still struggles to agree upon one single definition of 'brand' **(de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; Stern 2006).** As per **American Marketing Association**, a brand is a "Name, term, design, sign, symbol or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and the services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition." But this means, every time a new product with a new name, design, sign or symbol, a new brand is created, a brand is created. However many academicians do not agree to the stated definition of a brand. For many, brand is much more than a product, a logo, name, symbol or design. People interpret images and messages through their own perceptions often with very different results. It is imperative to recognize that while marketers instigate the branding process, it is the buyer or the user who forms the mental picture/map of the brand, which sometimes might be different from the intended marketing thrust. While marketers claim branding efforts they are making, they must never forget the fact that the final form of the brand is the mental evaluation held by the purchaser or the user. Hence brand can be assumed to be a bundle of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to make a promise about the unique and memorable experience. This 'holistic' view of the brand is different from the traditional 'product centric' view of the brand **(Ambler and Styles 1996).** The 'holistic' perspective assumes that a brand's value bundle

could mean many different things to different people like means of identification to simplify handling or tracing, means of protecting unique features legally, means of demonstrating quality, means of providing with unique and positive associations, source of competitive advantage and source of financial returns to manufactures and means of identifying source of product, means of reducing the risk by assigning responsibility on the manufacturer, search cost reducer, symbolic devise and signal of quality for the customers **(Ambler and Styles 1996; Balmer and Gray 2003; Berry 2000; Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1997; Erdem and Swait 2004; Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela 2006).** As reasoned above, a brand is obviously created by a company to elicit a bundle of positive meanings and responses. So, if a brand is perceived as a promise of reliable performance to a consumer, then consumer's behavior towards that object will be based on those positive meanings. However, the meanings that brands represent might not always be positive. Hence, behaviors directed at some brands may be based on the negative meanings that they represent to consumers. In any case, an essential criteria of a brand, is that it must be more than a tool for identification but it must also act as a communication tool that gives an object an enhanced meaning. The concept of brand equity is what separates brands from symbols, names, and other general cognitive categories that are also able to act as bundles of meaning. Therefore, the final criterion of a brand is that it must be able to alter the 'value/worth' of the entities with which the brand is associated.

1.2 Brands and Emotions

To understand the concept of Consumer-Brand relationship and specially the Consumer-Brand negative relations, it is extremely important to understand what emotions mean and how they are related to brands. Describing emotions is difficult job that is why people find it easy to express emotions rather than to describe **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** As explained earlier, Brands mean different things to different people; from functional objects to symbolic to partners and hence are capable of eliciting different kinds of emotions. Emotions occur when a perceived positive or negative significant change in personal life takes place **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000)**. Emotions were described as a set of multi-component response tendencies that unfold over relatively short time spans **(Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001).** Or, it can be considered that emotions are temporary feelings that might change over time.

Consumer behavior knowledge body agrees to the fact that emotions play an important role in the purchase behavior of consumers. Consumers make buying decisions based on their feelings and emotions towards certain brands **(Sinha, Ahuja, & Medury, 2011)** and often buy brands for their symbolic value **(Gelbrich, 2009).** Further some researchers suggest that marketers must focus on strategies that touch consumers' feelings or elicit positive feelings rather than traditional marketing mix strategies. These researchers define consumer-brand emotion (CBE) as 'a state of emotional attachment, which is characterized by strong positive affinity towards the brand and a tendency of the brand to top the consumers' cognition **(Sinha et al., 2011).** But, this definition of consumer-brand emotion does not cover the negative emotions that brands can elicit by not being able to fulfill consumers' expectations. It was also argued that negative emotions play an important role in the consumer-brand relationship and a hierarchical model to elucidate the role of emotions in consumer behavior was proposed. In this model, four basic emotions for negative effect: anger, fear, sadness, and shamefulness and two basic emotions for positive effect: contentment and happiness were mentioned **(Laros & Steenkamp, 2005).** Hence negative emotions were described as 'consumers' negative emotional responses evoked by appraising brand-related stimuli' and it was assumed that all these emotions towards brands can lead to different behavioral outcomes. In addition, negative emotions towards brands might have an impact on customer loyalty, purchase decisions, and the frequency that one is using a product **(Gelbrich, 2009).** However, the concept of brand avoidance/hate was not described in any of these studies.

2. Review of Literature

As mentioned, prior research is limited in terms of looking at the negative aspect of consumer emotions and relationships toward brands. The following section will present a review of previous research and theoretical aspects relevant for the present research. Review of literature will be structured as to build an understanding of the concept negative consumer-brand relations like Brand avoidance and Brand Hate and to differentiate it from Brand Love. Further various models proposed in the literature pertaining to the negative emotions showcased by consumers towards brands will be documented and analyzed to build the depth required to be able to explain the concept of Brand Avoidance. Finally the possible antecedents of Brand Avoidance will be studied to be able to develop a theoretical understanding on Brand avoidance.

The concept of 'brand avoidance' has not been mentioned in marketing literature and has never been formally defined. There are only two articles that have explicitly mentioned the term 'brand avoidance' **(Oliva, Oliver, and MacMillan 1992; Thompson et al. 2006).** The concept of brand avoidance has been used as an anti-thesis of brand loyalty **(Oliva et al. 1992).** It was suggested that satisfaction leads to brand loyalty and dissatisfaction leads to brand avoidance. Brand avoidance hence can be termed as a motivational state that dissuades an individual from continuing a consumption relationship with a particular brand and in turn leads to keeping away or altogether rejecting the brand. This definition may be supported by the meaning of the word avoidance in psychology. In psychology, the term 'avoidance' has been used as a motivational descriptor, where 'avoidance motivation' has been mentioned as a behaviour "instigated by negative or undesirable events or possibilities" **(Elliot 1999 p. 170; Markus and Nurius 1986 p. 961).** Therefore, by incorporating the psychological definition of avoidance, brand avoidance can be characterized as a behavioural attitude consumers have towards a brand, due to the negative meanings/consequences associated with the brand.

Hogg and Michell (1997) coined a term 'anti-constellation', or product sets that are rejected by consumers. Anti-constellation consists of two types of anti-consumption behavior, 'non-choice' and 'anti-choice'. Non-choice behavior is showcased when the products or services are beyond the means of the consumer, and hence are beyond the consideration set. Non choice behavior is attributed by three factors, affordability, availability and accessibility (Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg and Michell 1997). In contrast, 'anti-choice' behavior is showcased when the products and services are within the means of the consumer, but are positively not chosen because they are perceived to be incompatible and inconsistent with the consumer's other consumption preferences and choices" (Hogg 1998 p. 135). 'Anti-choice' consists of three factors that progressively increase in their intensity: abandoning old consumption habits, avoiding consumption, and aversion due to strong emotional dislike for a brand **(Hogg 1998).** It was stated that these three components of anti-choice (abandonment, avoidance, and aversion) overlap with each other to some extent.

Further the concepts like evoked, inert and inept sets can also be of use while explaining the phenomenon of brand avoidance (Narayana and Markin, 1975). Evoked set included products or services considered for purchase by a prospective customer. Inert set includes products and services which the consumer doesn't consider any better than the one being used currently. Inept

set includes products and services that the consumer has resolved not to purchase for various reasons, such as a bad experience, or negative feedback from various sources.

There exists a phenomenon of brand hate closely related to brand avoidance. To build a deep understanding of the wider discipline of negative consumer brand relationships, the phenomenon will also be studied from the review of literature. Existing literature on hate can be divided in three different categories: psychoanalysis (interpersonal context), social psychology (intergroup context), and basic emotion research **(Rempel & Burris, 2005)**. In psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud defined hate as an ego state that wishes to destroy the source of its unhappiness **(Freud, S, 1915).** The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology defines hate as a "deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards a person, group, or object" **(Reber, A.S., & Reber, E. (2002).**Within this categorization as well there are many contradictory definitions have ben assigned to the concept of hate. Some characterize hate as a motivation **(Rempel & Burris, 2005)** or emotion **(Weingarten, 2006)** while others define it as an attitude **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** Due to these contradictions, there is not yet a common definition of the concept of hate used in the literature. Most authors seem to agree that hate can be seen as a stable, enduring and a long-term feeling **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Rempel & Burris, 2005; Royzman, 2004; Weingarten, 2006).**

Hate always requires a subject and an object and expression of hate camouflage different feelings, beliefs, and attitudes **(Weingarten, 2006).** In other words, the feeling of hate is caused by multiple factors. Some see hate as a motivation and describe the concept as: 'hate is a motive associated with the goal of destroying or diminishing the object's well-being' **(Rempel & Burris, 2005).** Because hatred is believed to be long-lasting, many psychologists consider it to be more of an attitude or disposition than a temporary emotional state that requires evaluation of an object as possessing inherently dangerous traits **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** The triangular theory of love was adapted into the triangular theory of hate which argued that 'hate has multiple components that can manifest in different ways and different occasions' **(Sternberg, 1986, 2003)**. The theory proposes three hate dimensions: disgust, anger/fear, and devaluation/diminution. On the basis of this theory, 'passionate-hate' scale was developed to test whether ones subjective mental state towards an individual shows specific patterns in the brain **(Zeki & Romaya, 2008).** It was argued that hate is complex biological sentiments which can make people do bad things. In a study carried out in University College London by Semir Zeki,

one major difference between love and hate was found to be in the fact that large parts of the cerebral cortex – associated with judgment and reasoning – become de-activated during love, whereas only a small area is deactivated in hate. Surprisingly, it was found that hate can also be an all-consuming passion like love. But whereas in love, the lover is often less critical and judgmental regarding the loved person or object, it is more likely that in the context of hate the hater may want to exercise judgment in calculating moves to harm, injure or otherwise exact revenge. However, this theory explains hate between people or groups and not the consumer-brand relationship. At this point, there is hardly any literature that connects the concept of hate directly to research conducted in the field of consumer-brand relationships, however some studies focus on the behavior of consumers who have negative feelings, beliefs, and attitudes towards brands **(Grégoire et al., 2010, 2009; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009)**.

In contrast, the concept of brand love has received far more attention. The term brand love was used to refer to a consumer-brand relationship that corresponds to positive attitude, positive emotional connection, self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, and attitude strength **(Ahuvia, Bagozzi, and Batra, 2014).**Further brand love was also defined as an affinity or adoration towards the brand, especially in comparison to other competing options. The concept of Brand love is founded on the beliefs that the brand qualifies to be a unique partner, as well as is irreplaceable. On the other hand, brand hate was defined as an intense negative emotional affect towards the brand **(Bryson, Atwal, and Dreissig, 2010).**

A set of 11 brand love dimensions consisting of passion, duration of the relationship, self-congruity, image, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust, and declaration of affect was developed **(Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008).** Brand love is defined as 'the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name' **(Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).** In this study brand love was found to have a positive effect on brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Thus, brand love is seen as more extreme than just liking a specific brand.

The same can be true for brand hate; it is more extreme than just disliking a brand. Negative emotions consumers have towards brands may vary in intensity (i.e. disliking and hate). This intensity is found to be multidimensional **(Sonnemans & Frijda, 1994).** Factors that are influencing the intensity are for example the duration and the peak of the emotion, and the

strength and severity of action tendency, and the degree of drastic behavior. Anger, for instance, is seen as an emotion with strong momentary magnitude, but is of shorter duration **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** The peak intensity of love and hate is somewhat lower than for example rage, but it may last for a longer period of time with a consistently high level of intensity **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** As evidence from the literature, brand hate can be seen as an intense negative emotion towards a brand that is stable, and enduring **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Rempel & Burris, 2005; Weingarten, 2006).** On the same lines brand hate could be defined as 'an intense and enduring negative emotional affect towards the brand' **(Bryson, Atwal, & Dreissig; 2010, Bryson, Atwal, & Hulten; 2013).**

Equal to satisfaction and dissatisfaction, there exists a controversy about whether love and hate are equal and opposite (i.e., two opposite points on a single continuum) or independent to some degree. In other words, that the presence of brand hate implies the lack of brand love, and vice versa. It was proposed that brand attachment and brand aversion represent opposite ends on the scale, and that a transition from one end to the other is possible over time **(Johnson, Matear, and Thomson, 2011).** Building on this, it was argued that in the middle of these two ends is indifference i.e., the brand relationship is neutral and there are no feelings for or against the brand **(Park, Eisingerich, and Park, 2013)**. On the similar lines, it was argued that consumer satisfaction and consumer dissatisfaction is not the opposite of each other **(Giese and Cote, 2000).** Consumers may be satisfied with some aspects and dissatisfied with others, or they may simply not determine whether they are satisfied at all, they are just not dissatisfied i.e., indifferent. This reasoning can also be applied to brand hate and brand love i.e., the opposite of brand love is not brand hate, but rather indifference and consequently lack of interest regarding the brand.

Consumers-brand relationships can be negative for various reasons, including a brand's failure to meet individual needs leading to dissatisfaction **(Bryson, Atwal and Hulten, 2013, Romani, Grappi and Dalli, 2012)**, unmet expectations (**Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009, Dalli, Romani and Gistri, 2006),** physical attributes and functions (**Romani, Grappi and Dalli, 2012, Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013),** past experience **(Roy, Ishghi and Sarkar, 2013, Romani, Grappi and Dalli, 2012),** country of origin (**Bryson, Atwal and Hulten, 2013, Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu and Hyder, 2000),** product category **(Fetscherin et. al, 2014),** its association

with a particular undesirable group **(White & Dahl, 2007),** or the inconsistency of brand image, values, or morals with those of consumers **(Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009)** and personality traits **(Atwal and Hulten, 2013, Romani, Grappi and Dalli, 2012, Roy, Ishghi and Sarkar, 2013, Dalli, Romani and Gistri, 2006, Aaker, 1997, Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009, Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013, Escalas and Bettman, 2005 and Jhonson, Matear and Thomson, 2011).** Consumers may also have deep-seated negative affect for a brand because what the brand stands for is in conflict with consumers' values or concept of self **(Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001).** Also, a previously positive consumer–brand relationship can transform into a strongly negative relationship characterized by anti-brand behaviors **(Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011)** or brand enmity described as an "intensely involving relationship characterized by negative affect and desire to avoid or inflict pain on the other" **(Fournier, 1998).**

Consumers may start avoiding and eventually hating the brands due to undesirable experience that the customers have with the product or service **(Hempel 2013)**. This takes place when the perceived value does not meet the expectations. **(Lee 2007).** An important aspect of branding includes making promises to consumers **(Balmer and Gray 2003; Berry 2000; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; Vallaster and De Chernatony 2005).** These promises create a base to expect something; therefore it is indisputable that brand promises lead to expectations **(Gronroos 2006).** Within a consumer's mind, the meaning of a brand is partially made up of a set of expectations about what is supposed to happen when the consumer purchases a brand **(Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000).** Unmet expectations may lead to negative disconfirmation, which can further lead to dissatisfaction **(Halstead 1989; Oliver 1980; Swan and Combs 1976).** Subsequently as a result of dissatisfaction, a consumer might exit the brand relationship by switching to another brand **(Oliva et al. 1992).** Therefore there is a need to ensure a customer does not feel dissatisfied after purchasing the product. According to a survey 49% of consumers make an effort to avoid brands when they shop; of those, 81% say that their avoidance was due to a bad experience **(Dolliver 2001).** Therefore it is also recommended to offer a good overall experience to the consumers as it's difficult to get new ones. Experiential avoidance of brands develops from incidents involving direct first hand negative experiences and this motivates consumer to avoid undelivered promises with the brand (Lee 2005).

A qualitative research found four motives for consumer brand retaliation: product failure, perceived injustice, situational factors (waiting, crowds etc.), and service recovery failure **(Funches, Markley, & Davis, 2009).** Hence, these are all situations involving an experience with the product or service of the brand. Brand hate can be caused due to negative attitudes related to negative experience with the product **(Salvatori, 2007).**

With regards to the negative promises framework, the notion of 'value-inadequate promises', stated as deficit-value can also be a reason for forming brand avoidance. Deficit-value is not motivated by first hand experiences of undelivered promises that lead to unmet expectations, nor is it driven by symbolically unappealing promises that threaten to move the consumer closer to his or her undesired self. Instead, deficit-value avoidance is motivated by a perception that the brand promise is simply inadequate in terms of the individual's utility based requirements.

Brands are conceptualized as an indication of 'added value' to the consumer **(de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998)**. Value may be referred to as the evaluation of the utility of the product/service based on the benefits received relative to cost incurred. This cost might include time, money, effort, and search costs (**Monroe and Chapman 1987; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Zeithaml 1988)**. Thus, a brand augments the value of a company's product or service when it promises the consumer more benefits for fewer costs.

Although the concepts of value and quality sometimes appear confusingly similar, literature suggests that the two should be treated differently and must not be confused. Quality is an evaluation of the technical superiority or excellence of the product or service relative to other substitutes that satisfy, meet, or exceed customers' expectations **(Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991; Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan 1998; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Zeithaml 1988).**

However related, perceived quality and value might be, perception of quality, in general, is more stable than perception of value for what a person finds valuable might change as per the consumption situation, and even during the consumption process **(Zeithaml 1988).** In contrast, the perception of quality mostly remains consistent across consumption situations; thus, although perceived quality could influence the perceived value of a product **(Dodds et al. 1991),** the two might be considered as independent of each other. In other words, high quality does not always translate to high value. A brand could be a signal of high quality; however, it may still be of little value to someone who does not wish to pay a high premium **(Zeithaml 1988).**

Concepts of value and quality are socially constructed. In terms of quality, the consumer's judgment of the 'excellence' is a relative comparison, and is based on his or her knowledge regarding the performance

of other products. Similarly, an individual's understanding of cost to benefit trade off might also be based on the social context to which the individual belongs.

Further customers like to pay high premium to acquire the brands they have significant knowledge about. Brand knowledge leads to brand awareness, recognition, and recall and also helps in framing the desired brand image (mental map) in conjunction with the brand's marketing programs. Logically, a consumer might attribute an unfamiliar brand as having a poor cost to benefit ratio and, therefore, evaluate it as being an unacceptable trade-off.

Consumers' personalities can be inferred from the brands they use, from their attitudinal attachment towards different brands and from what brands mean to them. The psychological self of an individual is one's unique identity. Self represents affective and cognitive memories about one's past and present as well as one's future plans and goals **(Markus & Nurius, 1986).** These memories are intricately connected as an ongoing event **(Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004).** Customer–brand relationships can be argued to be based on the concept of the self since the self has been advocated to be one's center of the universe and determines how information is processed and behaviors are enacted **(Markus & Nurius, 1986).**

Like having perception for different people and objects, consumers have a perception of themselves. Consumers make brand decisions on the basis of whether owning or using a particular brand with a particular image, is in congruence with their own self-image. Brands are only bought if they enhance the conception that consumers have of themselves, or if they believe the brand's image is in sync with their own. Just as people take care while choosing companions who share a lot in common with themselves, so are brands, which symbolize particular imagery, are chosen. As brands serve as expressive devices, people therefore prefer brands whose image is closest to their own self-image.

This way of looking at personality in terms of a person's self-image can be traced back to Rogers' self-theory. A person's self-concept is formed in childhood. Social interactions help people become aware of their actual **self-concept** that is an idea of who they think they are, also known as 'me as I am' **(Parker, 2009).** However, as they look inward and analyze themselves against the social yardsticks, they may wish to change their actual self-concept to what is referred to as the ideal self-concept, that is who they think they would like to be 'the good me' **(Parker, 2009).** Consumers buy and own brands which they believe bridge in this gap between their real self and the desired self. One of the purposes of buying and using particular brands is

either to maintain or to enhance the individual's self-image which also impacts their psychological well-being **(Aaker, 1997; Parker, 2009).**By using brands as symbolic devices, consumers communicate about themselves. When they buy a particular brand and receive a positive response from various social groups, they feel their self-image to be enhanced and buy the brand again. In effect, they are communicating that they wish to be associated with the kind of people they perceive as consuming that particular brand.

On the other hand people also select brands to avoid undesired stereotypes. Psychologists describe 'undesired self' to be comprised of experience based negative aspects. It was also suggested that the distance between 'undesired self' and 'real self' can be a better reference point for measuring the satisfaction than the distance between the 'real self' and 'desired self'(Ogilvie, 1987). Put in other words consumers might more likely judge their well-being in relation to how distant they are from their most undesired self. Hence undesired self can be considered to explain the consumption related attitudes **(Bosnjak and Brand, 2008).**

Among several theories supporting the critical role of self-relevance in the customer–brand relationship, of particular importance is Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model. The model suggests that people build and maintain close relationships to expand their self by including other in the self that enhance their ability to accomplish their future goals by borrowing the resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the other. This enables the person to act and think as if some or all aspects of the other have partially become the part and parcel of person's own, thereby expanding the self. In other words, the other is treated as the self or "including others in the self" **(Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991).**

The close relationships between the self and others have been expressed in the past in terms of the overlap between the two **(Aron et al., 1991; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000).** The greater the overlap, the stronger and more positive the relationship is. The authors of brand attachment **(Park et al., 2010;Thomson et al., 2005)**and brand love **(Batra et al., 2012)** opine the same view in their consumer-brand relationship studies. This view of the consumer–brand relationships is also consistent with that of consumer culture theory (CCT) proposed by **Arnould and Thompson (2005)** who argue that consumers use brands to construct their sense of identity.

These studies establish that the closer is the brand with the self-concept of consumer; the better is the consumer-brand fit and hence positive is the relation. However, when a brand is perceived as

a threat for self-contraction, one will be averse to the brand and feel distant from it. This relationship is termed as brand aversion. Brand attachment and brand aversion represent opposite ends of the consumer-brand relationship spectrum at any point in time, while the transition from one end to the other is also possible over time **(Johnson et al., 2011).**According to research on intergroup conflict, relationships perceived as close were accompanied with feelings of love, loyalty, commitment, solidarity, brotherhood and sacrifice **(Brewer, 1999),** whereas relationships with partners or groups far from the self were accompanied by feelings of contempt, frustration, hatred, and aggression **(Mallick & McCandless, 1966).** The relationship in the middle between the two ends could be termed as the brand indifference where the relationship is neutral and lacks any motivational force for or against a brand.

Being somewhat related to self-concept connection, the concept of brand–self distance was coined **(Park, Eisingerich, and Park, 2013).**Brand-self distance is operationally defined as the perceived distance between a brand and the self. It refers to the valence of the relationship (a close relationship being positive while a distant/far relationship being negative). It is determined by the self-relevance (and not limited to self-concept only) of brand memory. When one does not have highly self-relevant cognitive and affective (personally meaningful) memories about a brand, one will not perceive a close brand–self relationship, but instead will be indifferent to the brand. If, however, brand memories are highly relevant to one's self, one will feel closer to or farther from a brand than the indifference point, depending on the valence of the memories. Further when personally relevant cognitive and affective memories about a brand are not highly accessible, one may not perceive the relationship with the brand as psychologically close or far as would be the case when memories are highly accessible **(Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998).** This was termed as the concept of brand prominence. Brand prominence is operationally defined as the perceived memory accessibility of a brand to an individual. In other words, the perceived brand–self distance is not as psychologically salient when memories are not as readily accessible as when they are.

Three components that determine whether one develops feelings or emotions of brand attachment or aversion were described **(Park, Eisingerich, and Park, 2013).** These were enticing versus annoying the self, enabling versus disenabling the self, or enriching versus

impoverishing the self. When the brand possesses e.g., the three negative components, the likelihood that consumers develop an adverse attitude toward the brand is increased.

Of the many themes, some customers might avoid or hate a brand for they believe in the brand being morally irresponsible and unethical. The common defining artifacts in this themes was found to be that these brands were perceived as being oppressive, unethical, and potentially harmful to the wider world; as a result, the consumer wished not only to avoid these brands and but also showed their disconfirmation with the brands by joining anti brand communities. The basic idea is that moral/ethical issues cause ideological resistance towards a brand and hence might push the customer into hating the brand. The consumer is motivated to avoid socially detrimental promises.

Moral legitimacy is the ability of a brand to benefit the wider community **(Kates, 2004).** So if a brand is perceived to be detrimental to the wider world, it generates the emotion of hate.

Further, some obvious similarities between moral/ethical conflict and the identity mismatch were found in the posts and comments posted by people on brand hate pages. Certainly, these people had their attitudes based on the inauthentic/ hypocritical actions of *brands*, and their lack of legitimacy. Furthermore, theories used to inform identity mismatch (organizational disidentification and image congruency theory) suggest that people manage their self-concepts by disidentifying with organizations, products, or brands, which they assess as being inconsistent with their own image and values **(Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Dolich 1969; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Graeff 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982).** Thus, it is possible that the motivation for joining the brand hate pages on the basis of moral/ethical conflict might well stem from consumers wanting to disidentify with a brand/company whose unethical practices are perceived to be incongruent with their own moral values. These themes have been discussed under separate heads in this research as in identity mismatch an individual dissociate with brand for it might take the individual to its undesired self which might have an impact on an individual's own well being. In contrast, moral/ethical conflict consists of incidents where the individual starts considering a brand unethical because of the negative impact the brand on the wider world.

Brand loyalty can be referred to as a consumer's attachment or devotion to a brand **(Aaker 1991).** Frequently investigated in terms of customers' response to the way brand is marketed **(Blackston 1995)** or purchase behavior of customers **(Dyson, Faar and Hollis 1996)**, brand loyalty actually encompasses a lot more **(Fournier 1998(b), McAlexander and Schouten**

1998). Consumers can express their loyalty to a brand through a variety of thoughts and behaviors in diverse settings. For example, consumers might express their loyalty in social settings by actively defending and promoting their brand as superior to a particular competitive offering.

As discussed earlier, consumers derive meaning and identity from what and how they consume **(Belk and Costa 1998; Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Englis and Solomon 1997; Fournier 1998a; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).** Consumers may also define themselves in terms of what and how they do not consume **(Englis and Solomon 1997; Fournier 1998(b); Hogg and Mitchell 1996; Hogg and Savolainen 1997; Wilk 1996)**. Sometimes consumers might be seen making brand choices to mark both their inclusion and exclusion from various lifestyles. Essentially, consumers avoided those brands that they found as defining membership in groups with which they did not identify. This suggests that a consumer's loyalty toward any particular brand may be embedded in a larger set of brand constellations **(Solomon and Assael 1987)** and anti-constellations **(Hogg and Mitchell 1996).** In other words, loyal users of a brand may derive an important component of the meaning of the brand and their sense of self from their perceptions of competing brands, and may express their brand loyalty by playfully opposing those competing brands. This phenomenon is termed oppositional brand loyalty.

3. Gap in the existing literature

Brand avoidance can be considered as a "dark side" of consumer-brand relationships because the literature has not dedicated the same effort to this topic as has been devoted to the analysis of positive attitudes like Brand Love and Brand Attachment.

This asymmetry seems quite obvious as marketers are very much interested in knowing the practical consequences of having positive or favorable consumer-brand relationships which are positive WOM, brand loyalty, increased willingness to pay a price premium, and forgiveness of brand failures, all of which make a brand a preferred choice as a partner. On the other hand, this asymmetry is difficult to justify on a theoretical level considering that, in order to better understand and explain purchase and consumption behavior based on consumer-brand relationship, it is extremely necessary to put both positive and negative perspectives together.

There has been a recent increase in consumer research on the topic of brand dislike, brand avoidance and anti-consumption **(Banister and Hogg 2004; Englis and Soloman 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Hogg and Banister 2001; Holt 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Zavestoski 2002a, Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009; Portwood-Stacer, 2012).**

But, in contrast to the concept of love, the concept of hate and avoidance has received less attention in the literature so far. The existing literature can be divided in three different categories: psychoanalysis (interpersonal/familial context), social psychology (intergroup/hate crimes), and basic emotion research. Within these categories, there are contradictory definitions of the concept of avoidance. Some refer to it as a motivation **(Rempel & Burris, 2005)** or emotion **(Weingarten, 2006)** while others refer to it as an attitude **(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).** Due to these contradictions, there is not yet a common definition of the concept of brand avoidance used in the literature. Further to explore this phenomenon of brand avoidance, there is a need to find out the antecedent of brand avoidance. Hence, there is a need to summarize extant and fragmented literature from various disciplines like psychology and behavioral sciences within a single framework that could explain the concept of brand avoidance which has not yet been covered extensively in previous Consumer-brand relationship studies.

Studying this phenomenon of brand avoidance is even more important for the Web 2.0 along with its tools (e.g., online discussion forums, consumer review sites, weblogs, social network sites, etc.) to exchange product information (**Lee, Park and Han, 2008**) has made this phenomenon even more relevant. Traditional word-of-mouth, which was known to be an oral form of interpersonal non-commercial communication among acquaintances, has transformed into a more contagious form of communication, namely electronic word-of-mouth. Electronic word-of-mouth refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product, brand or company via the Internet **(Hennig-Thurau et.al. 2004).** Since electronic word of mouth is 'independent of marketers' selling intents **(Lee & Youn, 2009),** is thus considered to be more trustworthy and credible' **(Bone 1995; Bickart & Schindler 2001).**

Previous research suggests that negative word-of-mouth has greater influence on customers' brand evaluations than positive word of mouth **(Arndt, 1967; Mizerski, 1982; Richins, 1983,**

1987; Wright, 1974) and unfortunately, bad experiences spread much faster than good experiences. Studies also indicate that dissatisfied consumers engage in spreading negative word of mouth at least twice as frequently as satisfied consumers communicate their peers about positive product experiences encountered by them **(Hart et al., 1990; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Richins, 1987).** User-generated content has significantly increased in the last few years. There are numerous anti-brand or brand hate websites that allow consumers to review, rate and evaluate the products and the services of companies **(Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009).**

Negative word of mouth, traditional or Electronic, is the outcome of customers' evaluation of the brands as good or bad on various parameters. Yet, despite this growing interest, the extant literature still lacks a comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance, its related themes and antecedents.

A potential criticism of previous studies on related fields lies in their reliance on only one type of data for theory development, that is, in depth interview dialogue to portray a descriptive picture of what Brand Hate means, from the customers' perspective. But, given the increasing numbers of anti-branding and Brand Hate websites, the freedom with which consumers are able to speak their mind on the internet along with the advent of research techniques like netnography, there is a need to study online hate communities to better explore this phenomenon.

4. Objectives

The study proposes the accomplishment of following objectives:

1. To explore and investigate the antecedents of Brand Avoidance in general
2. To find out the antecedents most predictive of the Brand avoidance behavior.

5. Research Methodology

The study will begin with finding out the antecedents of brand avoidance. Attempt to shed light on this phenomenon will be made by gathering the relevant data from participants whose experiences may help to build understanding of phenomenon leading to Brand avoidance. To accomplish this objective a two phase approach will be used i.e. in depth interviews and netnographic analysis. A potential criticism of previous studies on related field lies in their reliance on only one type of data, that is, interview dialogue. Given the increasing numbers of

anti-branding and Brand Hate websites, the candour with which informants are able to speak their mind on the internet coupled with the advent of research techniques like netnography, this limitation can be addressed effectively. Initially, two consumers will be interviewed to sensitize the researcher to the area of investigation. The findings that will emerge from the analysis of these interviews can guide further data gathering and these interviews can be used for practical purposes such as refining the interviewing skills, estimating the length of interviews, and development/modification of the interview guide. The most important contribution of these initial interviews will be their ability to increase the theoretical sensitivity. Firstly, in depth interviews of 15 respondents will be conducted to find out the antecedents of Brand avoidance. Since, the number of in-depth interviews conducted is dictated by the number of relevant themes that emerge during the course of the investigation, the number might vary at the time of actual interviews. In general, data collection is conducted until saturation point, where the themes begin to repeat reliably **(Taylor and Bogdan 1998).** In-depth interviews are the chosen method of data acquisition as they are an effective tool for gathering the rich qualitative data necessary for theory development in an under researched area **(Churchill, 1979).** Secondly, Brand avoidance themes will be identified using Netnography from the online Brand Hate Communities present on selected Brand Hate Pages/Websites to confirm the result of in depth interviews conducted in phase one. Three Brand Hate pages/websites of selected brands (various product/service categories) will be chosen on the basis of popularity, regularity of content posting and number of followers. These Brand Hate pages will be tracked for duration of 6 months. The basic idea is to find out various themes of Brand avoidance that could be used for item generation. A questionnaire consisting of items will be developed on the basis of the themes collected from the in depth interviews and netnography content analysis of Brand Hate pages/websites. Questionnaire will be circulated to a sample size of 500 respondents. The responses will be collected online (creating links on online surveying websites and sharing them on Brand Hate pages and other social media sites) as well as physically. The responses so generated will be analyzed by using Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory factor analysis and Multiple Regression to achieve stated objectives.

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Fetscherin and Heinrich (2014) also present another taxonomy, the *Brand Feeling Matrix* as summarized below in the table.

	Weak Relationship	**Strong Relationship**
Positive Feelings	E.g., Brand Satisfaction	E.g., Brand Passion/Brand Love/Brand Loyalty
Negative Feelings	E.g., Brand Avoidance	E.g., Brand Hate/Brand Divorce

Review of Methodology of articles related to Brand Hate

Sr. No	**Authors**	**Study**	**Methodology**	**Reference**
1	MSW Lee (2008)	Brands we Love to Hate: An exploration of Brand Avoidance	Exploratory, Qualitative research, Grounded Theory, In Depth Interviews, Theoretical sampling, Theoretical sampling, Sample size-23	Lee, M. S. W. (2008). Brands we love to hate: An exploration of brand avoidance (Doctoral dissertation, - ResearchSpace@ Auckland).

2	S. Romani (2006)	Brand Dislike: Representing the Negative Side of Consumer Preferences	Exploratory, Qualitative Research, Projective techniques: Collages and Introspective essays, Sample Size-151, Atlas. Ti	Romani, S. (2006). Brand dislike: representing the negative side of consumer preferences. Advances in Consumer Research, 33.
3	M.V. Delzen (2014)	Identifying the Motives and Behaviors of Brand Hate	Quantitative study, Convenience Sampling, Sample size-45	Delzen, M. V. (2014). Identifying the motives and behaviors of brand hate. Master's Thesis, University of Twente
4	Bryson et al. (2013)	Towards the conceptualization of the antecedents of extreme negative affect towards luxury brands	Exploratory, Qualitative Research, In depth Interviews	Bryson, D., Atwal, G., & Hulten, P. (2013). Towards the conceptualization of the antecedents of extreme negative affect towards luxury brands. Qualitative Market Research, 16(4), 393-405.
5	Salvatori (2007)	Brand Hate: The Dark Side of Consumer Attitudes Towards a Brand.	Exploratory, Qualitative Research, In depth Interviews	Salvatori, E. (2006). Brand Hate: The Dark Side of Consumer Attitudes Towards a Brand.